



News Release

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Testing remains critical tool in fight against COVID-19

Over the counter tests can now help state track positive cases

OLYMPIA – As the Delta variant spreads throughout every region in Washington, demand for COVID-19 testing increases. With that, many people are turning to various over-the-counter, at-home tests when they have symptoms or when they need a test for other reasons. These tests can be convenient and improve access to testing but it is important to ensure people are still using the right kind of test, [taking steps to get care and isolate from others if they are positive](#), and positive results are reported to the state.

Reporting helps the Department of Health (DOH) determine how and where the virus is spreading so resources can be allocated to reduce the spread. Now, it's easier than ever for people who buy home tests to report their own results. Thanks to a partnership with Washington 211, it is now possible to report a positive test result from an at-home test through the state's COVID-19 hotline. Hotline personnel will determine next steps based on zip code so results can be recorded and reported, and can guide callers through any questions they may have

The state hotline, 1-800-525-0127, is available Monday from 6 AM to 10 PM, and Tuesday to Sunday (and observed holidays) 6 AM to 6 PM. Language assistance is available.

There are many testing options in Washington, and people can still find a testing location at the [Department of Health website](#), or through many of the state's local health jurisdictions.

“Testing is a critical tool to understand the current surge and help slow the spread of disease,” says Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH, Acting State Health Officer. “It is important for everyone who has symptoms or a known exposure to COVID-19 to get a test, regardless of vaccination status.”

Which test is best?

The main types of tests to detect COVID-19 infections are molecular tests, including PCR tests, and antigen tests.

- Molecular tests look for genetic material from the virus that causes COVID-19; these results can take a little longer, but they are the most accurate tests available.
- Antigen tests look for certain proteins on the virus surface; the results come in faster, but they are generally less accurate than molecular tests in most circumstances. Over-the-counter tests are generally antigen tests.

Antigen tests are most accurate for people with symptoms, but they can still produce false negative or false positive results. With those tests, if you are symptomatic and you get a negative result, it's advisable to get a confirming molecular test to be sure. Also, if you are asymptomatic and get a positive antigen result, you should again get a confirming molecular test.

Relatedly, over-the-counter tests are generally approved for serial testing; please follow the instructions on the test for any repeat testing as indicated to improve accuracy.

What's next?

If someone tests negative, but is symptomatic, they should get a confirming molecular test before resuming normal activities. If they test positive, they should follow the guidelines on [this handout](#). If they have economic or other challenges, like getting groceries, medications or many other needs, help is available through [Care Connect Washington](#). When someone with a positive OTC test result submits their test result via 211, they are able to be connected to corresponding case and contact tracing and resources via Care Connect Washington.

Testing is an important tool to help Washington get back to normal, and everyone should do their part by getting a test when they're symptomatic or have been exposed to someone with COVID-19.

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